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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 08 KINSHASA 002047

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SUBJECT: THE CONGOLESE TRANSITION CURRENT AND FUTURE, AND  
THE U.S. ROLE

Classified By: Roger Meece. Reason 1.4 (b/d)

1. (C) Summary: There has been major progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the past few years, ending years of open warfare involving eight national armies and numerous domestic armed groups. Peace accords have yielded the formal withdrawal of foreign troops, a domestic transition process leading to elections, and an unprecedented level in central Africa of international community involvement, including a major U.N. peacekeeping operation. The current peace is tenuous, however, and the transition structure is ungainly and fragile, liable to the risk of collapse from numerous internal and regional threats. As well, any strategy to achieve long-term stability in the country must take into account the de facto lack of a unified coherent government in Kinshasa. Our overriding policy priorities must be the success of the DRC transition process, and cessation of destabilizing inter-state activities. There are four main areas for attention: 1) the security environment, 2) preparation and conduct of elections, 3) establishment of government authority across the country, and 4) regional relations. Success is by no means guaranteed; however, the U.S. has an important role to play to ensure positive outcomes in each of these areas. This cable describes background developments leading to the current situation, summarizes the existing strategic framework and future plan, and outlines priority areas for USG support or intervention. End summary.

#### Background and Context -----

2. (C) Following decades of bad governance under the Mobutu dictatorship and an inconclusive & sovereign national conference, a central government in then-Zaire had become largely irrelevant for the vast majority of its citizens by the mid-90's. Despite immense natural resources, overall conditions had degraded to the point where one could no longer meaningfully speak of national infrastructure, GDP experienced a long-term decline, and a political vacuum had developed. In essence, the country had no functional national government, with all the attendant negative economic and social consequences to be expected from that central reality. The 1994 genocide and war in neighboring Rwanda generated enormous waves of primarily Hutu Rwandan citizens crossing the Zaire border, including ex-Kigali government extremists implicated in the genocide as well as civilian refugees. Rather than seeking to address positively the growing eastern crisis, various Zairian leaders continued free-wheeling profit-oriented practices, dealing with and supporting the Rwandan extremist Hutu leaders.

3. (C) Unfortunately, the international community also failed to take any meaningful action to bring under control the armed extremist elements that continued to operate in the vast camps established in eastern Zaire. After two years, the Kigali government had had enough with what it viewed as an unacceptable status quo and ongoing security threat emanating from the eastern Zaire camps. In 1996 Rwandan forces, acting in concert with other nations, moved to break up the camps with invasion forces. Whether intended or not, the action also brought about as a corollary the collapse of the precarious Zairian equilibrium. With a broad alliance of African states eventually joining in against the widely-disliked Mobutu, the Kinshasa government fell within months. It was replaced by a government composed largely of Rwandan- and Ugandan-backed figures, with Laurent Kabila installed as President by mid-1997. The new government in essence basically threw out all remaining vestiges of the Mobutu regime, readopted the name of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and began to build new government institutions from scratch.

4. (C) The Laurent Kabila government, however, proved itself also incapable of competent performance. Perhaps inevitably, it increasingly chafed under continuing Rwandan influence, leading to growing tensions with its erstwhile patron. Eventually this led to renewed warfare in August 1998, and new invasions by Rwandan and Ugandan armies. Unlike 1996, however, other African states moved to support Kinshasa, eventually creating an alliance of Zimbabwean, Angolan, Namibian, and Chadian forces working with the Kabila

government arrayed against Rwandan, Ugandan, and Burundian armies aligned with various Congolese rebel clients. Mixed into this picture was an overlay of Hutu/Tutsi conflicts, with Kinshasa embracing active support of Rwandan Hutu extremists (e.g., ex-FAR, Interahamwe) in the war, and the continuing conflict reinforcing an already-widely prevalent anti-Tutsi sentiment in much of the DRC.

15. (C) A military stalemate developed in 1998/1999, resulting in de facto separation of DRC territorial administration, largely divided between the Kinshasa government backed by its southern Africa allies; a Ugandan-sponsored group, the Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) in the north; and a Rwandan-backed group, the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) controlling much of the east. Foreign sponsors participated heavily in exploitation of Congo's rich mineral wealth in all three zones. Inevitable tensions among the various Congolese groups and their foreign backers, among the Congolese themselves, and between supposed allies (e.g., Rwanda and Uganda) produced splinter movements and an overall proliferation of various armed groups and militias.

16. (C) Efforts by the U.S. and others to find a peaceful solution were hindered by the necessity to seek means to address simultaneously the varied, and largely unrelated, interests of the numerous foreign states involved in the conflict, as well as to redress the continuing political vacuum in the Congo, including a complete lack of coherent national DRC political structures and constituencies. As a result of enormous efforts and substantial international pressure, and with critically important active intervention by the U.S., the Lusaka Accord was achieved in 1999. While the Lusaka Accord was not sufficient to bring an immediate halt to the conflict, it did provide the basis for an eventual formal withdrawal of foreign troops from DRC territory, and establishment of an "Inter-Congolese" dialogue as a way to establish an internal process toward national governance. The latter dialogue, again with heavy international engagement, eventually resulted in a "Global and All-Inclusive Accord" (the Sun City Accord) in 2003 establishing the basis for the formal DRC transition process incorporating all former Congolese belligerents, as well as other internal "non-armed" groups leading to elections. These two agreements comprise the foundation for the end to active hostilities and they set the stage for the current environment.

DRC Transition: Ungainly, Burdened by Mistrust, But Yielding Results

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17. (C) Given the complexity of the domestic political environment, the required compromises among the varied Congolese groups and diverse foreign patrons, and the duration of active warfare, it is hardly surprising that the transition structures established by peace accords are ungainly and characterized by persistent deep mistrust among key officials and factions. An additional impediment to transition success is residual suspicion between the "ex-government" faction in Kinshasa, headed by President Joseph Kabila, and its perceived enemy neighbors on the eastern border, particularly Kampala and Kigali. This is coupled with continuing links between the other former main Congolese belligerents and their respective foreign allies (the MLC and Uganda; the RCD-Goma and Rwanda). In short, the Kinshasa transition government is not a coherent single entity, but rather more a collection of former adversaries existing in uneasy co-habitation. It is essentially not capable of domestic or international long-term engagements routinely undertaken by established governments. In addition, many in the DRC political class in all factions of the transition are not eager to see a successful electoral end to the transition, and it is likely that relatively few would find any popular base for electoral success.

18. (C) Despite daunting challenges, the transition has been producing results, albeit at a slower pace than widely desired. While many considered it highly unlikely three or four years ago, formal withdrawal of foreign national armies from DRC territory has been completed, ongoing combat has been stopped, and all major DRC political groups have been brought together into a transition government, however unwieldy that government may be. Reversing decades of economic under-performance, important economic results have been achieved (e.g., stabilization of exchange rates, low inflation, three years of real GDP growth), and preparations for scheduled 2005 elections (including key pieces of legislation) have been moving forward. Perhaps the most significant indicator of progress, political leaders of all major groups have increasingly been gauging their rhetoric and actions to what amounts to early electoral positioning, a reflection that the political leadership generally is increasingly thinking in terms of a political, and specifically electoral, process rather than renewed military operations. Overall, the situation in most of the DRC stands in startlingly positive contrast to that existing a few years

ago.

## Factors Supporting Progress

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19. (C) There are four major forces favoring transition progress. First, there is general war-weariness among the large majority of Congolese, coupled with a continuing sense of national identity that broadly cuts across all factions. The war had largely stalemated with no major change in sight, and the de facto division of the country worked against both economic and political aspirations of most Congolese. The transition process offers the only viable alternative. Secondly and related, there is a deeply-held desire by most Congolese for a durable peace. This has crystallized into strong expectations for elections as the most visible symbol of the end to the transition - and the DRC's long conflict. This represents a dramatic change from the stoic resignation characteristic of much of pre-war Zaire's population, and represents a major and positive force to which political leaders are sensitive. It also has a negative aspect, however, with a potentially explosive reaction should popular expectations not be satisfied. Third, there is an unprecedented engagement in the DRC by the international community. This is manifested in the 17-member International Committee To Accompany the Transition (CIAT), which is in fact a formal transition institution created by the underlying peace agreements. The CIAT is widely credited as a beneficial and needed force to maintain progress. Finally, the UN peacekeeping operation (MONUC), while far from perfect, brings a significant military force to help counter the influence of the many remaining armed groups and so provide at least a reasonable promise of needed adequate security conditions, and it has proved invaluable in numerous cases to keep the transition moving forward.

## But Major Threats Also Remain

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10. (C) Progress to-date notwithstanding, there are innumerable ways for the transition process to derail, and even lead to a resumption of generalized warfare. The continued existence of numerous armed groups, including formal armies, various armed militias, diverse localized Mai Mai factions and bands, and armed Rwandan Hutu extremists all create security threats and occasional flare-ups, especially in the volatile eastern regions. The continuing severe weakness of central government institutions and the lack of any real government authority in many parts of the country leaves an on-going dangerous and destabilizing political void in the country. In addition, the oft-displayed fecklessness of the Congolese political class always has the potential of producing gridlock, or worse. Years of invasions, occupation, and conflict have left a degree of tension in the east between various communities, most notably the Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese Tutsis and Hutus and other Congolese ethnic groups. Finally, continuing influence and reports of active intervention (including military forces) in the eastern region by neighboring countries, particularly Rwanda and to a lesser extent Uganda, and enduring commercial interests also reinforce the threat of renewed instability which would undoubtedly affect all of the DRC.

## The Way Forward

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11. (C) The CIAT, GDRC leaders, and most observers concur that the desired end-state of the transition period is a legitimate Kinshasa government elected through free and fair elections; a sound political, economic, and social basis for durable stability throughout the country; and regional international relationships that at minimum provide for normal diplomatic relations and resolution of differences through dialogue. The overriding priorities for the short-to medium-term must be the success of the DRC transition process, and the end to destabilizing interstate activities. The analysis above and the transition structure suggest that the strategy to achieve these ends needs to be focused on four critical areas: security, elections, state authority/development, and regional relations. The following paragraphs provide brief summaries of each critical area designed to indicate current or planned activities, but are not comprehensive descriptions. The first three largely domestic issues are reflected in transition road maps,<sup>8</sup> one adopted by and utilized by the CIAT, and a similar document recently approved by the GDRC. The road map outline serves as the base line strategic transition plan as discussed within the local community.

### a) The Security Environment

This includes two major components. The first deals with the existing multiple armies and combatant groups, estimated to include as many as 300,000-plus men under arms. A major demobilization (DDR) program has been designed with heavy World Bank involvement, intended to demobilize roughly 200,000 combatants. A specialized but urgent sub-component of this program is one dealing with the substantial number of child soldiers. Substantial support has already been

committed to this effort, including World Bank funds, as well as the involvement of USAID and other donors. Specifically, USAID's support is focused on reintegration of ex-combatants back into communities. A needed complement to this effort is to produce an integrated national Congolese army. While the latter lags behind the DDR framework, conceptual and unfortunately competing frameworks for integration have been prepared by the Belgian and South African governments. Currently there are promising efforts underway in Kinshasa and respective capitals seeking to harmonize these plans and establish a master unified plan. Financial resources have not yet been identified, although the Europeans in particular are implying in conversations that funds may be found at least to initiate the effort. Armed local groups, including those in Ituri and potentially some Mai Mai groups, represent a related but separate issue, with solutions unlikely pending definition and establishment of the overall integration and DDR programs. Finally, armed Rwandan Hutu extremists represent a distinct problem, with such groups creating security problems within the Kivus as well as representing a continuing threat to Rwandan security. A MONUC-led voluntary disarmament and repatriation program (DDRRR) had shown promising results, repatriating to Rwanda many thousands of combatants and their dependents. Numbers of new DDRRR enrollees dropped to near-zero, however, following the June takeover of Bukavu by &dissident8 RCD Tutsi generals Nkunda and Mutebusi. Many of the remaining Hutu extremist elements, estimated to number between 8,000 - 15,000, may require forcible disarmament. Prevailing current thinking among CIAT members is that this task should be undertaken by a specially selected and integrated FARDC &Kivu Brigade8 (pursuant to the integration plans discussed above), whose operations would be closely coordinated with MONUC-reinforced deployments and operations in the east. Progress in all these areas must be realized, and be visible, prior to the holding of elections if the volatile eastern region is to participate in voting in a meaningful way. Completion of the full integration/demobilization effort, however, will not be required prior to elections, and indeed may continue for some time into the future.

#### b) Elections

The centerpiece of the Sun City Accord is the holding of elections, targeted for June 2005. The accord provides for up to two six-month extension periods as necessary. Significant delays, however, risk strong if not explosive negative public reaction. Election preparations have proceeded laboriously, but at this point there is a general election plan in place, a budget reviewed and largely endorsed by the international community, and the start of needed legislation by the National Assembly and Senate. An Independent Electoral Commission has been formed and is starting to operate, thanks in large measure to timely USAID intervention. The election plan is based on as simple a model as possible, necessary given the limited time available, the size of the country (roughly the size of Western Europe), population (approximately 60 million), and utter lack of national infrastructure. For example, no census is planned, only a voter registration exercise. Approximately half of the calculated \$285 million elections budget has been promised to-date by donors, primarily the EU.

Key decisions remain, including the question of the timing of local, provincial, and Presidential elections (e.g., simultaneous or sequential), and the form of balloting (e.g., single-round or runoff elections for President). Strong international and domestic pressure is being maintained on political players to complete important legislation, including changes or approval of a new draft Constitution, which itself requires approval by referendum. As noted above, however, political parties and leaders are already beginning what amounts to election campaign activity and there is no clear dominating political figure or party with a decisive national majority. A crucial but often overlooked aspect to this issue is the immediate post-election period, with inevitable unhappiness and challenges by election losers, a critical concern in a region burdened by large numbers of weapons and combat-experienced fighters. Continued strong engagement and support by the international community, including MONUC within the limits of that body's mandate, will be required for the successful conduct of elections, and transition through the post-election period.

#### c) State Authority, and General Development

As previously noted, a large part of the current problems in the DRC can be attributed to the political vacuum at the center - the lack of viable government institutions and operations to govern generally, much less to manage a large and diverse country such as the Congo. This will require sustained effort over a long time, extending far beyond elections, essentially building a new structure from a base near zero. There has already been significant progress, however, seen in areas as diverse as macro-economic indices (as cited above); the gradual establishment of minimal government services (e.g., police operations, schools), albeit in limited areas; and even the recent appointment of an Ituri District Commissioner, the first sign in years of

Kinshasa government authority in that troubled district. Despite good gains in the government's revenue base in the past two years, domestic-generated resources are still extremely limited with a current GDRC domestic revenue budget base of roughly \$450 million dollars for an area equivalent to the U.S. east of the Mississippi. Clearly, sustained and significant international support will be required for an extended period in this area. As well, accompanying a gradual replacement of military operations by peacetime government, major reconciliation efforts are needed at the local grassroots level and some are needed at the national level, particularly in the volatile eastern areas. Without the success of such reconciliation efforts, accompanied by activities bringing the promise of economic improvement, sustainable stability in the eastern region will be hard to achieve. Related, the DRC's largely dysfunctional judicial system requires rebuilding. Finally, visible economic and social development progress must be seen for nascent government institutions to have credibility, and to address the urgent basic needs of Congolese citizens. Macroeconomic achievements need to translate into new investment and employment, and improvements to the disastrous state of DRC basic education, health, and other services must be evidenced.

#### d) Regional Relations

Obviously stability in the DRC and indeed the region requires that regional governments refrain from unilateral cross-border military operations or other activities intended to undermine neighboring states. The DRC is particularly vulnerable given the precarious and divided nature of its current transition government. For long-term stability, however, we need to go further and work to build intergovernmental relations in which governments are capable of dealing with each other, and resolving conflicts through dialogue rather than confrontation. Such is not currently the case, and the respective governments, especially those in Kigali and Kinshasa, are unlikely to normalize their relations if left to themselves. There are numerous efforts to promote regional dialogue, including initiatives sponsored by the U.N., Belgium, South Africa, and other African states as well as the U.S. A basis for improved relations exists in the form of commercial and economic potential, and a presumed shared interest in peace and stability. Ultimately, however, deep-seated mistrust and personal animosity arising from years of conflict, exacerbated by events such as the recent massacre of Congolese refugees in a camp in Burundi, must be overcome by a realization that each country can best serve its own interests through peaceful dialogue. At minimum, clear and consistent international pressure must be maintained, rejecting as unacceptable cross-border interference. Ultimately, the countries in the region themselves must renounce ambitions to work against neighboring states, although realization of this goal is unlikely until a more durable and coherent government can be established in Kinshasa following elections. More broadly, success in this area will require sustained international engagement to promote concrete cooperation measures (e.g., Uganda/DRC and Rwanda Joint Verification Mechanisms), improve border controls, and regularize ongoing contacts and dialogue.

12. (C) Progress in the inter-related four areas identified above will be self-reinforcing, i.e., progress in any area is helpful to efforts in the other three. Conversely, at least some degree of success in all four areas is needed to achieve overall objectives. A lack of progress in any of the four will necessarily retard overall progress, and the overall objective of a stable region requires at least partial forward movement in all four categories.

#### Other Issues -----

13. (C) The sectors cited above do not constitute a comprehensive listing of important outstanding issues. For example, improper exploitation of the DRC's natural resources by foreign and Congolese interests continues as a major problem. It is unlikely, however, that satisfactory resolution of this issue can be found prior to progress in establishing Kinshasa government authority and at least some improvement in working relations with neighboring countries. Likewise, sexual violence directed against women is a horrifying past and present reality, with some armed groups practicing systematic sexual predation as a weapon. While there are numerous activities underway to address this problem, including significant USAID operations, definitive resolution is unlikely in the east absent progress in military demobilization and integration, as well as establishment of coherent DRC government authority. Impunity also remains a major problem requiring resolution, with a long-term answer certainly requiring at least minimal improvements in the DRC's barely functioning legal system. All of these and other issues are important. The four areas cited above, however, remain the central focus areas that will in turn permit progress to be realized to address a variety of other issues.



A - Central Focus

¶14. (C) As indicated above, the central problem is the political void at the center, i.e., the lack of government institutions and authority in the DRC. U.S. engagement therefore needs to be focused primarily on support for the transition process, its successful conclusion through the conduct of free and fair elections, and follow-through for a successful post-election period. This activity needs to be complemented by continuing attention to ensure observance of non-interference across borders among the Great Lakes countries, and normalization of relations among all Great Lake states.

¶B. - International Cooperation

¶15. (C) The DRC is a huge country with accumulated immense problems. Certainly no single country alone has the resources to assist in finding the necessary solutions. Instead, we must focus use of our available resources, coordinating closely with other bilateral and multilateral countries and agencies to achieve the desired results. Fortunately, widely shared common objectives and much of the framework to enable such cooperation already exist, a beneficial product of the work done in recent years to bring an end to the DRC conflict. The principal national players involved are Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Angola as well as the U.S. All are heavily involved already with assistance and/or political support for the DRC's transition. These efforts are complemented by substantial involvement of the European Union, World Bank, IMF, ADF, and United Nations as multilateral partners.

¶16. (C) A general framework for coordination exists in the 17 member CIAT, whose membership includes all the main bilateral engaged countries (e.g., Belgium, France, U.K., South Africa, Angola and U.S.) as well as the European Union, the African Union, and MONUC. We should stay strongly engaged in CIAT activities to ensure a maximum degree of harmonized policies and activities. Complementary senior-level consultations between capitals should ensure a close degree of coordination between discussions being conducted at the level of the CIAT, and topics being discussed during bilateral/multilateral consultations.

¶17. (C) The MONUC peacekeeping operation represents another element vital to the success of the transition process. MONUC has a unique capability to help ensure adequate security conditions in the DRC necessary for progress, and this should therefore be its central and overriding focus. MONUC, however, also has a variety of other capabilities and, in accordance with the existing UNSC resolution, responsibilities. Within the constraints of available resources, the U.S. should continue to be as supportive as possible of the MONUC mission, while continuing to press to maintain a MONUC focus on key priorities to preclude mission creep, and enlargement of an already existing mission/resource gap.

¶18. (C) Ongoing discussions being conducted in New York at the U.N., and in particular the Security Council, as well as Bank and Fund sessions also provide an opportunity for improved coordination with multilateral coordination through the CIAT. To-date, internal USG coordination regarding these fora has been less than ideal, and efforts are needed to ensure better communication and coordination regarding proposed discussions, initiatives, and activities. The U.S. has considerable influence in each of the multilateral bodies, and we need to do a better job to ensure that such influence is being used effectively in terms of our bilateral agenda, as well as being coordinated with our positions in the CIAT multilateral context.

C - Bilateral Activities

¶19. (C) Within the general context of overall support for the transition process, current U.S. government programs and activities should be focused on four major areas: 1) governance issues, including election preparations, 2) military and security issues, 3) development and institution building, and 4) regional relations.

- Governance and elections: The U.S., primarily through State and USAID activities, has been very much engaged in this area, and continued major involvement will be important to a range of governance issues. In terms of elections, USAID was instrumental in quick intervention, for example to get the Independent Electoral Commission in operation. It will be important for us to continue to be very active to encourage further progress and ensure acceptable procedures. Our support, however, is constrained by limited USAID Democracy and Government Funding. Specifically, at this point, we have very little available or committed to direct

election support, a dramatic contrast to the EU's total committed to-date of over \$100m.

- Military and security: The U.S. has already committed resources to the DDR program, both through its support of the World Bank and in bilateral terms through USAID. As previously noted, there are promising initiatives underway for harmonizing competing models from South Africa and Belgium of the equally critical military integration program. Pending results of that effort, we should be prepared to look at \$3.4 million in available leftover prior-year FMF funds for potential support to the integration and military reform program as may be appropriate. We should also be attentive to child soldier demobilization activities, and general reintegration programs for additional intervention with any new resources made available.

- Development and institution building: The U.S. is involved in these efforts, primarily through USAID. This is a long-term process, however, and sustained engagement will be required to show satisfactory results both pre- and post-election to help create conditions conducive to long-term stability. Lists of economic, education, and health needs are very long, and the government structures and policies needed to support progress are largely yet to be created. One major area that is currently underfunded by all donors is national and regional reconciliation programs. Progress in achieving reconciliation, particularly in the troubled east, is essential for long-term peace in the DRC and the region. We should be attentive to the possibility of any new resources that may be made available for these kinds of activities, as well as seek to tap into expertise in Africa or elsewhere that has proven effective to achieve results. Clearly, general development activities should also be identified for target regions that could complement any reconciliation programs that are implemented.

- Regional relations: The U.S. is already engaged in promoting tripartite talks involving key players. As it progresses to a more concrete form, the tripartite process should be tailored to mesh as effectively as possible with other ongoing initiatives, including established Joint Verification Mechanisms, regional efforts promoted by South Africa, the African Union, and other African countries, as well as those of the U.N. This too represents a long-term investment likely destined to pay full dividends only following the establishment of a post-transition, more effective Kinshasa government. In the short to medium term, it is of critical importance to maintain a consistent and strong message rejecting as unacceptable cross-border unilateral activities designed to undermine the security or influence of neighboring governments within their own territories.

#### U.S. and Mission Constraints

120. (C) At the current time, there are two major resource constraints limiting, or threatening to limit, U.S. influence in key areas.

a) First, available funds to support democracy and governance activities are extremely limited. At this point, for example, the U.S. has committed a total of approximately \$5 million over two years in indirect support of the election process, and has no funds identified now for direct support of scheduled elections. While USAID has leveraged its funding to be particularly visible in early election planning, lack of further funding will likely mean declining U.S. visibility and influence as the transition process moves forward to active preparation and conduct of the DRC elections. Likewise, there are few USG funds available or foreseen at this point to assist with improving critically important judicial/legal systems, including anti-corruption efforts, nor for larger-scale reconciliation efforts which are particularly required in the troubled eastern region of the DRC.

b) The Embassy is currently slated to lose two of its four Political Officer positions in calendar year 05, necessarily implying a substantial cutback in Embassy political reporting and activities. This severe reduction in political section staffing will mean a major reduction in reporting from the troubled eastern region, a general reduction in the frequency and depth of contacts among the many and diverse political parties and groups as well as within the government, and a general loss of USG visibility and activity. Worse, this cutback will likely be occurring over the precise period when DRC political activity will be particularly intense, associated with the elections.

121. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.  
MEECE